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"It is a demon!" muttered Pablo, as, with eyes fixed with terror, he gazed upon the awful form.

THE WINGED WHALE; OR, THE MYSTERY OF RED RUPERT.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
Author of "Scarlet Hand," "Heart of Fire," "Wolf Demon," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE WATER DEMON.

The stars twinkled brightly in the dark sky, and were reflected back in little ripples of shining light as they gleamed on the somber waters of Pensacola Bay.

It was about nine of the night, in the year 1814.

A little fishing sloop, containing three fishermen, had just rounded the southern point of Santa Rosa Island and was beating up the bay toward the city of Pensacola.

One of the fishermen, a little wiry fellow, known as Pablo Domingo, was stretched out at full length in the bow of the "smack," keeping a sharp look-out ahead. The second man was crouched down in the center of the boat, while the third was at the helm.

"Keep her a little to the south'ard, Go-mez!" cried the fisherman in the bow to the brawny fellow whose strong hand was on the tiller.

"Ay, ay," he responded. "Pablo, what story was that that Diego was telling you on the beach just before we set sail this morning?" asked the man in the center of the boat, who was called Jose.

"You have sharp ears, Jose," said Pablo.

"Well, from his manner I guessed that he was telling of something worth hearing, and so I listened," replied Jose, honestly.

"And what did you hear?"

"Something about some terrible fright that he had got in the bay."

"Bah!" cried Gomez, with a look of contempt upon his face, "Diego is a coward; why, his own shadow in the moonbeams would cause him to take to his heels."

"He has seen more than a shadow if he speaks the truth," said Pablo, gravely.

"Well, what has he seen? Come, the story!" cried Gomez, impatiently.

"Hast thou never heard the story of the specter that is said to haunt this bay?" asked Pablo, mysteriously.

"What, the spirit of the Indian chief who was killed near yonder headland?" and Gomez pointed to the north as he spoke.

"Yes."

"And has Diego seen the specter?"

"He can not tell exactly what he saw," replied Pablo; "but I'll tell you what he told me. He had left the town in the morning and ran outside of the island to the fishing-ground, as we have done to-day. Night had set in when he hoisted sail for home. The breeze was light, and when he reached the shore-headland—he had run close in to the shore to avoid the set of the tide that was on the ebb—he fancied he saw a light twinkling up the little inlet; one behind yon headland, that is called Bayou Achee.

Curious to learn the reason of the light being there, he turned the prow of his boat toward the inlet. You know the mouth of it is very narrow and fringed with tall timber, although beyond it widens into quite a bay and winds some ten or fifteen miles inland."

"Yes, yes!" cried his companions, who were listening eagerly.

"The night was very dark; Diego could hardly see a boat's length before him. As he entered the narrow passage that leads to the bayou, the dense gloom of the tree-shadows made it seem as if he was sailing on a sea of ink. The breeze died away.

Before, behind, and all around him was darkness. Eagerly he looked; the glimmering light had disappeared. Believing that his eyes had deceived him, he put his helm up to return to the bay. As he slowly forged around—for the breeze was so light that it hardly stirred the sail—a strange circle of bluish light danced upon the water within the gloom of the bayou. In the center of the light appeared the outline of a horrible form. Exactly what it was like Diego could not say; for hardly had his eyes rested upon it when a sudden, fitful gust of wind filled his sail, and he glided through the dark passage into the waters of the bay.

When he again looked toward the bayou the light had disappeared; he saw nothing but darkness.

"A wonderful story," said Jose, after a moment's silence.

"All a lie!" cried Gomez, quickly; "a

more arrant coward than Diego never existed. I'll bet a bottle of the best wine in yonder town that he saw neither light nor demon form—that he never was within the shadows of yonder inlet!"

"Tush, Gomez!" exclaimed Pablo; "be reasonable. Why should he lie about the matter?"

"So that he may persuade good men that his blood has some fire in it. I'll wager that if we sail into yon dark passage, no mystic light will stop our way."

Jose made the sign of the cross in fright.

"The night was very dark; the moon had not yet risen and the stars alone shed their rays on sea and land."

Closer and closer came the boat to the dark headland, crowned with cypress trees, that, like a storm-beaten castle, guarded the entrance to Bayou Achee.

The fishermen passed from the open water of the bay into the narrow channel that led to the land-locked bay.

The shadows of the trees fell thick and heavy around the little boat that danced so lightly upon the surface of the tide.

No sound broke the funeral silence of the night except the idle flapping of the sails against the mast.

Within the sheltered inlet the boat no longer glided swiftly on; the winds that had filled her canvas lulled. A dead calm was around and about them.

The very air seemed heavy and thick.

In spite of his courage, Gomez shuddered when the gloomy shadows that guarded the entrance to the bayou fell upon him.

The boat lost its headway and remained almost motionless upon the bosom of the dark waters.

With straining eyes the fishermen gazed upon the gloom that covered the surface of the bay and then rose upward like a dark wall till it met the stars of heaven.

They saw no light or sign of life within the bayou.

"Get out the sweeps," said Gomez, softly.

The dread influence of the hour and place had its effect upon the spirit of the fisherman.

Slowly and softly the oars descended into the water.

The fishermen pulled as though they feared at each stroke to wake the specters of the lonely water cover.

The little craft felt the power of the strong arms, and she glided slowly on, the dark waters rippling with a low and mournful song from her sharp bows.

A dozen times had the long oars dipped

into the murky tide; a dozen times had the

drops of water—like long strings of elon

pears, the prizes of Orient climes—fallen

from the polished blades and returned to

the bosom from whence they sprung, when

a sudden start and a muffled cry of Gomez

held the fishermen, like statues, to their seats.

"But, if it is the specter of the Indian chief?"

"Then a good round prayer or two will scare him off," Gomez replied.

Quickly the light boat cut her way through the sullen waters.

The night was very dark; the moon had not yet risen and the stars alone shed their rays on sea and land.

Closer and closer came the boat to the dark headland, crowned with cypress trees, that, like a storm-beaten castle, guarded the entrance to Bayou Achee.

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held the fishermen, like statues, to their seats.

Dark as was the night, yet they could see

that the face of stout-hearted Gomez was pale with terror. His eyes were fixed upon the darkness before him and were staring with a stony glare.

For a moment the two looked upon the face of their comrade in amazement not unmixed with horror.

Slowly the two turned their heads. They guessed from the expression upon their comrade's face that they were about to behold a startling sight.

Afar off on the dark surface of the water gleamed a circle of strange, bluish light.

It was, apparently, some twenty feet in diameter.

The gleaming circle made the surrounding darkness ten times more intense by the contrast.

Then, to their horror, they saw that the strange light was advancing toward them.

With staring eyes they gazed upon the mystic light, fear tugging at their heart-strings.

It was like the head of a huge fish, and from the shoulders extended gigantic wings.

Its eyes were eyes of fire, that shed a lurid glare upon the darkness of the night; they seemed like red coals.

"The Virgin save us!" cried Gomez, in low tones of horror; "see you the horrible figure?"

"It is a demon!" muttered Pablo, as, with eyes fixed with terror, he gazed upon the awful form.

Gomez could not speak, but strove to pray to the saints to save him from the evil thing that had risen from the dark waters.

"It seems like a whale!" muttered Gomez, breathlessly. "I have sailed in northern seas, where the storm-king rages amid the icebergs; there I have seen the sea-monster, but this terrible thing has a different kind of head and wings; a winged whale my eyes never saw before."

"It is no living thing; it is a demon! look at its eyes of fire!" gasped Pablo, in fright.

Then, suddenly, the huge mouth of the beast or demon—whatever it was—opened, and a broad sheet of flame burst out upon the air. For a moment it lighted up the little bay and then all was darkness.

The circle of blue light and the terrible monster, that was like unto a winged whale, both had vanished.

Like men awakened from a terrible spell, the fishermen bent to their oars, and paused not till their little boat floated on the waters of the bay.

CHAPTER II.

THE RECOGNITION.

WHILE the fishermen were flying from the terrible form which they had conjured from the dark waters, all the beauty and fashion of the city of Pensacola had gathered in the spacious barrack of the fort, that had, for the nonce, been turned into a ball-room.

The rude walls of the shed—for it was little more—were decorated with the flags of the regiment—the ball was given by the officers of the troops that garrisoned the fort—and green boughs.

Long taper candles, almost countless in number, placed wherever they could gain vantage ground, lighted up the scene.

The gay uniforms of the soldiers, and the bright-colored silk and satin dresses of the ladies, mingled with the plain coats of the civilians.

It was the grandest ball that Pensacola had ever seen.

In a corner of the room stood two men conversing. Their dress told that they were Spanish officers; the wonderful likeness between them—though one was old and the other young—said that they were kindred in blood.

The elder of the two was a man, probably, of fifty years, tall in stature, muscular in build, and with the firm carriage of the head and shoulders that told of years of military life. His face was a strange one; hair, iron-gray in hue and waving in crispy curls, clustered over a high forehead, that was tanned almost to the hue of the Indian; his eyes were jet-black and as keen as the orbs of a hawk; his nose was curved like the beak of a bird of prey, and his massive chin, hid by a full beard, iron-gray in color like his hair, told of a firm will.

Such was the person of Don Carlos Alvarado, the commandante of Pensacola. The city at the time we write of belonged to Spain and was garrisoned by Spanish troops.

His son, Estevan, was strikingly like his father in appearance. His hair and eyes were black, his form slender and graceful, not cast in the rougher mold of his sire.

Estevan Alvarado held the commission of captain in the Spanish service.

"The old barrack is ringing with many a merry step to-night," said the commandante, gazing a pleasant smile upon his face, on the joyous throng.

"Yes," replied Estevan, shortly, a moody look upon his handsome features.

The intonation of the word was caught by the quick ear of the commandante.

He turned his eyes upon his son's face for a moment.

"What's the matter, Estevan?" he asked, quietly.

"Matter, father?"

"Yes; something is the matter with you," replied the commandante, in his quiet way.

"Come, tell me what it is. I have noticed that a cloud has been upon your face ever since the ball commenced. You have not yet danced."

"No, nor do I intend to," said Estevan, biting his lip as he spoke.

"And why?"

"Because there is only one woman in this room that I care to dance with."

"That is no reason why you should not dance at all; unless, indeed, the lady be engaged for the whole evening."

"That is the reason exactly," said Estevan, with a bitter laugh; "now can you guess who the lady is?"

"I have only to follow the direction of your eyes and they lead me to her," replied the commandante, with a dry intonation in his voice.

"And you see?"

"Isabel Morena, my ward," said the commandante.

"And my promised wife!" cried Estevan, bitterly; "and yet, to-night, when I sought her hand for the dance, she said—in her cold, icy way that she was engaged for the whole of the evening."

"And you?"

"Bowed and left her. The hot passion was swelling in every vein; but I had remained by her side, I might have spoken words that afterward I should have regretted."

"Estevan, my son," said the commandante, gently, "you are not proceeding in the right way to gain the love of Isabel. She is a woman—must be humored, flattered. She is beautiful, rich, a gentle and loving girl. She is worth the winning, and yet, like a rash, headstrong boy, you expect the prize to be cast at your feet without an effort on your part to secure it. You know as well as I, that Isabel does not love you; she has given her promise to become your wife, simply because I desired her to do so. The pledge is but an act of obedience, not of love. But as yet, she is heart free. She has never seen the man whom every pulse of her being pronounced to be her master. Why should you not win her love? You are young, a dashing soldier of tried courage, and above all, you have her promise to be your wife. Tush!" cried the father, impatiently; "at thy age, boy, when passion's fires ran riot in thy heart, and the blood leaped lightly in thy veins, the woman that I loved—as you love this, one—I would have won from a thousand rivals."

"But, she does not love me."

"And she does not love anybody else; therefore thy chance is good."

"But to see her surrounded by this throng, all worshipers at the shrine of her beauty, cuts me to the heart!" exclaimed Estevan, passionately.

"The ice that you complain of, seemingly freezes you alone," said the commandante, quietly; "but who are yonder strangers? their faces are new to me."

Estevan looked in the direction indicated by his father.

He beheld two young men with bronzed faces and a sailor-like air.

"Two friends of Señor Garcia, the merchant," Estevan replied.

"What a strange face the shorter of the two has; the sun has bronzed it almost to the color of the Indian."

"They are two Americans from New Orleans. I heard Garcia speak of them to-day," Estevan said.

The eyes of the commandante were fixed searchingly upon the bronzed face of the dark-hued stranger. A puzzled look appeared upon his features. He passed his hand slowly across his forehead as though by the act he would recall memories of the past.

"His face is very familiar to me," the commandante said, slowly.

Estevan looked at his father in wonder. The expression upon his face puzzled him.

"Do you know the American?" he asked.

"Yes and no," the father said, with a moody air; "the face is not strange to me, and yet, I do not think that I ever looked upon it before. It recalls bitter memories of years long gone; hours of danger, and of suffering rise before me from the dim vista of the past. It can not be possible that this stranger figured in the scenes that occurred long ago, for he is young; but his face stirs up strange recollections."

"If I remember right, Garcia said that it was the American's first visit to our city."

"I am a fool to let his face affect me so. It is not a fancy, nothing more," the commandante said, striving to cast aside the gloomy thoughts that had so suddenly oppressed him.

Leaving Don Carlos and his son in busy conversation, we will turn our attention to the two strangers—the Americans from New Orleans—who were conversing with the young Spanish merchant, Don Garcia.

The taller of the two was a stalwart but ungainly built Yankee from the town of Salem, Massachusetts, a broad-shouldered, powerful-limbed man, with a face as hard, angular and weather-beaten, as though it had been cut out of a pine stump. His sandy hair was cut quite short, except where two long locks curled down in front of his ears. The shrewd gray eyes twinkled with a cunning expression above the high cheekbones.

"Decius Andrews—so he was called—was not a handsome man, but honesty and truth were plainly written in every line of his rugged features. In years, he had probably seen thirty-five; and for his occupation, a glance at his storm-tanned features and his rolling gait would have easily told that he was a sailor; one who snatched his fortune from the heaving billows and the roaring gale.

His companion was a man of thirty, not quite so tall as Andrews, but superbly formed. Strength and grace were in every limb; the power of a giant, the suppleness of a snake combined. The muscles of his body—now hid by the garb of civilization—the victim of the Grecian Games might have envied. The exquisite cast of his head and neck would have shamed the fabled beauty of Apollo. Hair, black as the raven's wing, curled in tangled masses about his temples, and strayed, carelessly, down his neck, meeting the broad, white collar. His eyes were black, large and piercing, full of fire, yet at times, soft in their lustrous tenderness. His forehead was high and broad, his nose straight, the chin square and firm, and the full mouth, which betrayed just a hint of sensual fire, told of an indomitable will.

The face of the stranger would have attracted attention in a crowd; the more so that its color was almost as dark as the hue of the red savage. It was plain that it was not the effect of the sun alone that had bronzed his features, for his hands were of the same color, and if we should roll up the coat-sleeve, 'twould be to reveal an arm, tinted like the face and hand. The bronzing was Nature's handiwork—not the kiss of sun and wind.

This man was called Rupert Vane.

Vane and Andrews were fast friends.

Garcia, a young Spaniard with dark hair and eyes, and a frank and honest face, was pointing out to the two the notabilities of the ball-room.

Andrews was listening attentively, while Vane, with a listless air paid but little heed to the gay throng that surrounded him, or to the many glances of wonder or of admiration that his strange face attracted.

"Who's those two chaps yonder, covered all over with gold lace, looking poofy as a butterfly in June?" asked Andrews, indicating the commandante, Don Carlos, and his son Estevan, as he spoke.

"That is the commandante of Pensacola, Don Carlos Alvarado, and his son, Captain Estevan," Garcia replied.

Carelessly Vane turned his head, and his glance fell upon the two. A moment he gazed, a strange expression upon his face.

Both Andrews and Garcia noticed the look of bewilderment.

Mechanically Rupert passed his hand across his brow, pushing back the shining curls that clustered over his bronzed forehead, as though they baffled thought.

"What's the matter, Vane?" asked Andrews, in wonder.

"I do not know," replied the sailor, absently. "The sight of that man's face affects me strangely."

"Do you know the commandante?" Garcia asked.

"No; this is the first time that I have ever looked upon him, and yet his face calls up memories of my childhood, of years long gone by. I can not understand it."

"Why, you are a North American!" Garcia said.

"Of course, from the good old Plymouth Rock State, where they have the poorest gals and the biggest pumpkin-pies of anywhere this side of creation!" Andrews cried, enthusiastically.

"I can not understand the emotion that comes over me when I look upon that man's face," Vane said, with his eyes still fixed upon the noble face of the aged Spaniard.

"If you don't know him, and hain't never seen him afore, why in thunder should his face trouble you?"

"That is not true; it is a mystery even to me," Vane replied. "His face recalls events that happened when I was but a child. They rise before me as plain as though it was but yesterday they happened. I have not thought of them for years."

"It is very strange," Garcia said.

"Yes, I can not account for it," Vane replied, with a troubled smile on his dark face.

"The commandante is a worthy gentleman," Garcia observed. "I can not say as much for his son, Captain Estevan. He is one of the wildest young men in our city; thinks more of the gaming-table and the wine-bottle than he does of any thing else. He is to marry that beautiful girl yonder, Señorita Isabel, his father's ward."

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MEDAL.

A PECULIAR look appeared on the dark features of Rupert as he heard the name of Isabel, and a quick, passionate flush shot from his dark eyes.

The look was unseen by his companions, who had turned to gaze at the lady.

Andrews could not repress an exclamation of delight as his eyes fell upon the beautiful, child-like face of the girl who bore the name of Isabel Morena, and was the promised wife of Captain Estevan.

"Jerusalem crickets!" Andrews cried, with a low whistle, indicative of great astonishment; "she ain't a woman—she's a pictur!"

"Yes, she is beautiful," Garcia said, in admiration.

Rupert Vane spoke not, but his eyes kindled; his bronzed cheek burned, and the heart within his breast throbbed quicker as he looked upon the peerless beauty.

In person, Isabel Morena was about the medium height, of slender build and exquisite form. All the grace of the swaying willow was in every motion. Her complexion was as fair as Parian marble; her tresses gleamed like molten gold in the sunlight; her eyes, a heavenly blue, seemed too pure for one of earthly mold.

The face of Isabel Morena was the face of the Madonna; that face of rare beauty that the great masters—painters whose works will outlive all ages—were so fond of depicting upon their canvas. It was a face to love, to idolize!

It was not strange that the face of the beautiful girl should produce such an effect upon the two Americans.

"What do you think, Rupert?" said Andrews, "Ain't she a little ahead of any thing this side of sunrise, eh? Oh, doughnuts! she's enough to make a feller speak right out in meanin'!"

"She is very beautiful girl," Rupert replied, quietly, but there was a sonorous ring in his deep voice that did not escape the quick ear of his friend.

"I'll give you an introduction if you like," said Garcia.

"Like!" cried Andrews, quickly; "I'd walk ten miles through the biggest snowbank you ever did see for the pleasure of making the acquaintance of such a petticoated angel as this gal is."

"I'll ask her permission to present two of my friends," Garcia said; "there will be no difficulty about it; she is very amiable; as good as she looks."

"She looks sweeter than a bucket of pie-eat!" Andrews exclaimed, earnestly.

Garcia laughed, and leaving the two, proceeded to make his way through the throng to where the beautiful girl stood, surrounded by a little group of admirers.

Andrews watched Rupert for a moment.

The young sailor had his eyes intently fixed upon the face of Isabel. His chest was heaving and his breath came thick and fast. He seemed unconscious to all else but the beautiful face that his eyes were feasting upon.

Andrews touched him lightly on the arm. Rupert turned with a sudden start. The spell was broken.

"Ain't she a beauty?"

"She is more than that; she is an angel!"

Rupert replied.

"Kindler pilin' it on, ain't yer?" said Andrews, laughing.

"Did you ever see a more beautiful girl?"

"Guess I never did. She beats our Salem gals all hollow; and I tell you, New England gals are hard to beat," Andrews replied.

"You are right; on this earth there does not live a more beautiful girl than Isabel Morena!" said Rupert, impulsively.

"Well, now, you're pilin' it on! Struck all of a heap, eh?" Andrews asked, with a grin of good-humor. "Got her name, too?"

"Show!" cried Andrews, in astonishment.

"Yes, for fifteen years, waking or sleeping, her name has been ever with me. The howling wind has borne it to my ears when, on the storm-tossed sea, it has ripped the canvas from the spars. On the white iceberg, gliding, specter-like, by our dancing vessel, in the pale moonlight off stormy Labrador, I have read her name. And then, amid the carnage of the sea-fight, when the round-shot of the foe rattled through our cordage and drenched our decks with blood, I've heard her name whispered in the whistle of the passing ball. I have lived but for one thing, and that is to call you beautiful girl mine, and mine only."

Andrews was thoroughly astonished.

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Andrews was listening attentively, while Vane, with a listless air paid but little heed to the gay throng that surrounded him, or to the many glances of wonder or of admiration that his strange face attracted.

"That is a secret that I can not reveal even to you, old friend," replied Rupert, taking the rough hand of Andrews within his own and pressing it kindly.

"Then you knew that this gal was here before you come?" Andrews asked, in amazement.

"Yes," Rupert replied; "it is Isabel Morena that has brought Rupert Vane to Pensacola."

"And you're goin' to make love to the gal?"

"Thunder! but do you s'pose you stand any chance to win the gal?"

"If I did not think so, I should not try."

"Well, this beats Sancho!" muttered Andrews, perplexed. "You have been here before?"

The canoe was now lifted, carried over a spit of land, and once more put down into the water—but not the water of the main channel. They had entered the bayou.

This branch was here so closely bordered by trees that, being narrow, they arched overhead, and made such darkness that many a time and oft an owl had flown about hooting, thinking it was night.

"The Injine is right," said Steve, in that deep whisper which all who tread such dangerous ground become used to; "the Injine is right. We shall sartainly reach the farm this way slicker than 'other. So in with you; that tug up the O-hier has taken a considerable streak of daylight from us."

Kenewa lifted one finger to his lips, and motioned for the most complete silence.

As he did so, a low murmur of voices became distinctly audible. It came from the place where they had landed.

Fortunately the path they had taken was over the rock, where the sun being warm, but little trail would be left. Still it would not long be possible to blind the eyes of the Indians.

"Go!" whispered Kenewa. "If my brothers see me not soon at the Falls, my scalp will have been taken."

Not a word more was spoken. These leave-takings in the mighty forest were too common to excite experienced men, while to hold discussion with an Indian under such circumstances was pure folly. Kenewa had made up his mind.

The canoe was re-entered, Roland was placed forward as a scout, and the three adventurers advanced on their way. The scenery at once changed. Again the charming prairie vales came in view, where lowing wild cattle rested, and where the wolf sneaked, howling through the livelong night; gurgling brooks added their quota to increase the general streams, and tiny silent bayous noiselessly performed the same office.

The sun by this time touched the edge of the mystic horizon, swollen to treble its usual size, and was bidding the dark and clear line of the distant plains with the clouds; but presently the separation was clearly marked by a dim streak of blue across the blood-red disk of the great luminary.

Then all was night.

And still they sped onward, and the canoe glided into darkness as a dull, heavy sound fell upon their ears. The sound of hurrying waters.

Roland waved to his companion to check the progress of the boat, pointing as he did so upward.

"What is that yonder, upright, behind that bush?" he asked.

Steve gave vent to a laugh that shook the boat, but made no other noise, ere he replied:

"A reptile," he whispered. "I didn't think the captain had a-twisted him, but he's on the wrong side of the river. The devils of Shawnees have smoked our errand. 'Tother side's whar the Huron was to be. Now what ter do?"

"Canoe under tree," said the low, hushed voice of the young chief, from amid the dark belt that lined the shore.

His orders were obeyed without hesitation; the whole party landed, the canoe was forced into a kind of pool, and then all crowded down to hear the Indian's report.

The party of Shawnees below, five in number, having satisfied themselves that a cano had gone up the bayou in the direction of Judge Mason's—had determined to follow them by wading up the shallow stream. They were in no hurry, for the rest of the warriors, who seemed intuitively to guess the object of the young man's journey, were ambushed at the Falls, where the fugitives were expected to make a portage.

Kenewa had at once taken a short cut to the spot where he had met his friends, and there waited to apprise them of their danger.

In low, hushed tones a council was held. Roland's first thought was to reach the goal of his journey, which, by the river, was ten, by the forest five miles. All seemed, except Kenewa, who made no remark, equally desirous to proceed.

"And you?" asked Roland of the Huron.

"My three white brothers have decided," he said, simply; "let no one speak more."

The words had scarcely passed his lips when they heard the upward party of their foes splashing in the water close to the bank of the stream, where it was too shallow to float a huge war-canoe.

All clutched their rifles, all held their breath—a wall of green not four feet thick separated them from their fierce and relentless enemies.

The Shawnee band, composed of young and inexperienced warriors, uncontrolled by the presence of a chief, advanced, scarcely looking to the right or left, until they stood exactly opposite the hiding-place of the fugitives.

A glimmer of the eye, a compression of the lip, nothing more, and the four gallant fellows understood one another.

But they soon understood the reason which had induced the braves to hate. They had caught sight of their own crouching sentry on the right bank, and they knew that the canoe had not been captured. Where then could it be? With sudden gravity the young men decided on advancing and conferring with their elders, when a regular search of the two banks would explain the mystery.

This decided, on they hurried up-stream.

"Je—rusalem," hissed Steve, between his teeth, "that was a considerable light shave!"

"Tongue no made to talk," said Kenewa, dryly. "Come."

All involuntarily gave way to the Huron, as their recognized leader. In dangers of this kind, when men are neither foolhardy nor ignorant, the most experienced and trustworthy man at once moves to the front, as it was now. All had confidence in the Indian, and though he struck almost a backward trail and left the canoe to its fate, not a word of remonstrance was made, not a sign of hesitation discovered.

The belt of forest was soon cleared, and then, keeping within the dark and gloomy shadows, Kenewa led the way up-stream in a direction that must soon bring them on a level with the "Falls."

Then he suddenly halted, and the whole party concealing their guns, lest the least glint of rising moonlight should fall upon the barrels, peered out in the direction indicated by Kenewa.

Twenty-painted warriors, naked to the waist, armed and in their war-paint, were entering the stream.

No one moved, no one spoke, not an eye but watched that band of blood-thirsty red-men with the deepest interest—the Huron with half-contemptuous hatred.

They divided themselves into two bands,

and as they advanced were seen to light torches, with which to explore the shore. This would certainly enable them to spy out the canoe, which would set the whole raging party on their trail.

As soon as the last Indian had entered the water, Kenewa fell into a slow trot across "the open," having first selected a gentle kind of a ridge as a shelter behind which to advance in safety. His companions silently followed, and in 'em minutes more they were at the bottom of the "Falls," where the murmuring bayou fell over black rocks into the pool below.

A fearful yell rising on the night air from below now startled all the party.

"Found canoe," said Kenewa, quietly entering the stream, which, among the rocks, where the water glittered and shone in the silvery moonlight, was everywhere fordable, with care.

Again his companions obeyed, and in a remarkable short space of time all were on the opposite bank, and taking their way along the narrow natural pathway beside the rapids, that served from time immemorial as a portage.

Kenewa still was guide, and now, fearless of ambuscades, strode erect and manly, with his gun across the hollow of his left arm.

Suddenly, as if he had been shot, he fell to the ground, imitated by his companions, who knew that this act of his portended serious danger.

"Gun—rifle—shin in rocks," said Kenewa, in a low whisper, pointing to a kind of rampart fifty feet ahead, where they could, perhaps, have held their own against a party of Indians.

"Hist!" continued Kenewa, crawling to the cover of some bushes. In time, from the opposite bank came a flight of arrows, while along the path below came a dozen Indians bent on slaughter.

They, too, when their friends shot, would have sought cover, but the murderous crack of four guns was heard, and four of the howling red-skins paid the penalty in life and limb for their肆ious exposure.

Scarcely had the echoes of these shots died away, and while yet all was still, two cracks of the heavy western rifle were heard above, and as many of the bowmen bit the dust at the feet of their comrades.

None hesitated of the fugitives. They knew now who must be above, and hurried, after a word or two exchanged, to join them. It is a question who was most surprised, the two young Masons to meet Roland Edwards, or Roland Edwards to meet the two young Masons.

"Good news," said our hero, wringing their hands, and that is all that passed on their private affairs.

"I say strike for Masonville," then added Roland, "at once; if pursued we are more than a match for these ruffians."

"Good—Masonville," said the Indian, who stood on a high rock overlooking the forest, "much shoot down—log burn hot."

"Not go—kill," said the Indian, checking him; "follow Kenewa."

Away! away! through the tangled forest; under the gnarled oak they go; under the oak the elm, and maple, by a winding trail, that in the darkness of night, none could have followed but a native child of the wilderness.

Away! away! with burning brows, and compressed lips; up slopes, down hills, through valleys, until they come where they can hear the crackling of the flames.

"Good heavens!" cried the elder son, "the Indians have attacked the house and fired it! Come."

"Not go—kill," said the Indian, checking him; "follow Kenewa."

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and as they advanced were seen to light torches, with which to explore the shore. This would certainly enable them to spy out the canoe, which would set the whole raging party on their trail.

"The same here," cried James; and the three young men wrung one another's hand.

"Michel," then said the elder son, in a voice of deep solemnity, "bring along the spade and mattocks, that we may dig our mother's grave." And the brave fellow dashed away the scalding tears which no stoical effort could restrain.

All followed to the spot they had selected, which was by a seat under a tree, where in life she had loved to sit.

A tall cedar stood gracefully in the wind, a tiny stream rippled softly by, while above, from sunny morn to dewy eve, the feathered choristers would sing over her lonely grave.

No one offered to lend a hand.

Silent and solemn the youths began their self-assigned task, while the others stood around with lowering brows leaning on their rifles.

"Hold!" suddenly said a solemn voice, and the judge, pale, ghostly, but sterner than ever, stalked into their midst.

"Ah!" he cried, as his eyes fell upon Roland, "this wretch here! How dare he!"

The sons took each a hand of the youth.

"Father!" said Henry, gently, "by the memory of our sainted mother, I say we have wronged Roland. There is no time for explanations. All is well, and you are a richer man than ever."

"Rich!" cried the old man, with a haggard look, as he gladly folded Roland to his bosom, "rich! what avails it? Will riches give me back my wife? Will riches restore reason to my child—my child, Roland, your wife, that was to be—but never, never, never! Well, well, Roland, I'm glad to see you, very glad to see you. Now what are you doing, boys?"

They held down their heads.

"Ashamed, boys? No; dig, dig, dig! for the mother that bore you: she brought you into the world, and 'tis but fair you should see her out of it."

And the judge turned away with a laugh that made all the listeners' blood curdle in their veins.

It was a bright, sunny morn, and the trees waved gently and softly, and the birds caroled cheerily in the heavens, and nature in her richest hue lay mantling in all her gorgeous splendor before them, as their hearts too full for speech, these two brave boys dug their mother's grave.

Steve and Kenewa, ever alive to their duties as scouts, were outlying in the forest on the watch for the murderous white ruffians and their red-skin associates.

At last the task was over, and the young men came up from the pit.

Judge Mason sat upon a bench outside the tent, silent, motionless, with dark and lowering brows; his eyes were fixed upon the sheet which covered the corpse.

Of all the old man's wealth, of all his vast possessions, better than gold, jewels or precious stones, was that senseless clay from which the mystic soul had departed, and which was now fit only to be returned to earth—dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

All clambered up beside him, and truly, Martha glided ghost-like into the tent and whispered to Etie.

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SOON TO APPEAR,

HOODWINKED;

OR,

DEAD AND ALIVE.

A Physician's and Nobleman's Plot.

BY A. P. MORRIS, JR.,
AUTHOR OF "THE WARNING ARROW," "RALPH HAMON, THE CHEMIST," ETC., ETC.

Foolscap Papers.

The Oracle of the Month.

APRIL.

According to the latest and most approved almanac this is the fourth month, if you count right from January, and it is usually spelled Ape-er-ile, for short, and for the sake of variety. It is called April from the simple fact that apes are more plentiful during this month than at any other time.

Jammed in as it is between the cold-hearted March and warm-hearted May, its weather is average. When it rains, April is compared to a maiden who weeps because she can't go to the opera on account of having no beau, ideal or real; and when it is sunny it is likened to the same girl who smiles to hear that the performers did not come, and there will be no show.

The gentle deluges descending from the cerulean skies whither they were drawn by the all-absorbing sun, and falling with a lulling murmur and a musical cadence upon the soft, terrestrial surface of the palpitating globe, are very apt to make mud, and the foundations of sidewalks and crossings will be very variable, and after we have spent an hour in blacking our boots, or inveigled a dime darkly to undertake the job, and we step out proudly and sink into soft, diluted earth wretchedly, how forcibly are we reminded of the verse, "They who go down into the mud with boots, and do flounder in the great deep," etc., and how foolishly do we think of calling the attention of the city council to the state of the streets, when no councilman has to walk that way, and all is vanity!

April violets are supposed to bloom about this time, according to poets, who also bloom, but I am more inclined to think the violets are inclined to be more prolific in poetry than they are in the woods. By the way, nine out of ten poets who grind out their rhymes, and use such florid language, can not actually tell a bunch of violets from a bouquet of onions and garlic.

Because as for their botany

It's plain they haven't gotten tan.

(Persons with illiteracy, but poetical, turns of mind may fail to see any thing besides rhyme in the above couplet, but it is like a porous plaster, only needs application.)

The first of April is not our birthday by any means, but it is the day that we get our eyes opened, and occurs in the fore part of this month. How funny it is—to other people—for us to sweep the heavens with an inscrutable gaze, trying to divine somewhere in their azure and unfathomable depths the winged flight of imaginative birds as pointed out to our unseeing eyes by a youthful and deluding finger, with more mischief than conscience, and have gently whispered in our harmonious ears these deep-meaning, wide-reaching, uncharitable words, "April fool," and as one good turn deserves another, how does our dignified crushed to earth again when we turn round and catch that little, insignificant, philosophically-humorous urchin by the nap of the neck, and dimple his coat tails with the persuasive toe of our boot in the presence of a large crowd of other Aprilites; while we turn away, remarking that we are no fools, prefaced by a mill-dam, with the mill burned down, and afterward take a drink, and then going on our way again, another boot-black calls our attention to the fact that we have dropped our handkerchief, and while we turn suddenly to pick it up, change our notion and go and take another drink of wine on a friend's treat out of a delusive glass that won't bleed at 'any pour, amid many happy returns of the season, etc.

Going home to dinner we vow we won't be fooled any more, and change our notion on taking the first bite of dissembling pie, thinking that, with the early grass, our human natures are also getting remarkably green under the influence of dry jokes, which motion we second when in the evening we dress and go to sup with a family we have no acquaintance with, having received a very pressing and politely false-written invitation.

The fact that Easter occurs during this month will set everybody to laying eggs in calico. Colored eggs, hard-boiled and laid by imaginary rabbits, will be all the go among the children.

The 15th of April, eighteen hundred and something odd, I went to school all day, or nearly. I began at the foot of my class, and

maintained my position in spite of every thing they could do. Such another case of indomitable energy and perseverance is not to be found in the annals of this world or the world before it.

The 17th day of April is not celebrated for any thing that I know of.

Now, as the weather is getting warm and pleasant, and every thing in nature calls for the beginning of labor, you will find that naps in the daytime go, a great deal better than ever you had any idea of.

The days grow longer and the nights grow shorter, and the sun rises sooner, and the little birds singing praises on the trees in front of your window break the rosy bonds of slumber that bind you, and you open your eyes and almost swear.

You will know that the summer is not far off by the bursting of the buds, the springing of the plants, and also by the prevalence of flies in your coffee again.

Your heart experiences as it were a fuller life, touched by the harmonies of awakening nature, and bed-bugs make their appearance.

The warm breezes from the south come balmy, blown, and the flies bite with particular vigor.

You will discover beauty in every thing you see; likewise cockroaches in your foots when you put them on.

Now is the time to sow your wheat; it is the handiest to sow it in flower pots, for then you can take them in out of the weather.

If you are tired of this world and want to commit suicide, settle up your affairs and go to spading in your garden.

There are thirty days in this month. If you tell the truth once a day, by the end of the month you will have told just thirty, which will be a remarkable number for some of you, unless you are all dry goods dealers.

There are four Sundays in this month, so at the rate of two cents each Sunday, you can put eight cents into the contribution plate during April, which will be a good deal for many of you.

Yours with premonitions of ague,

WASHINGTON WHITENHORN.

The Great Story of the Year!

THE WINGED WHALE;

OR,

THE MYSTERY OF RED RUPERT.

BY MR. ALBERT W. AIKEN,

AUTHOR OF "HEART OF FIRE," "ACE OF SPADES,"

"WOLF DEMON," ETC.

In this number we give to our readers the opening chapters of this superb story. It is written in Mr. Aiken's best style, and located in an entirely new field. The plot is excellent and will baffle the guess of the oldest reader.

The Winged Whale, the mysterious demon of the waters that haunts the bay of Pensacola; the terrible form, the sight of which the bravest men shudder, is a creation which could only have come from the brain that created the "Wolf Demon." Then the love of the dashing sailor, Red Rupert—about whose birth and life there hangs a terrible mystery—for the fair Spanish girl, Isabel; and the stories of his rival, the Spanish captain, against his life, are told with a weird grace and power. The nature of the mysterious bond that binds the Spanish Commandante, the old Indian chief and the young sailor together, will puzzle the keenest-eyed reader. Nor is there an element of humor wanting in the story. The shrewd Yankee, Decius Andrews, and the drunken assassin-soldier, Roque Vasca, with his boastful lies, supply that.

THE BOHEMIAN.

In the olden time France was overrun with a strange class of people, known as Bohemians. They were supposed to be natives of Bohemia. They were fortunetellers, sword-swallowers, dancers, performers of all sorts of strange feats, given generally in the open street to the wondering eyes of the gaping multitude. These outcasts kept to themselves, and were looked upon by the people with fear and aversion.

Gradually the name Bohemian began to be applied to adventurers of all nations—to the men or women who had no visible means of support and "lived by their wits," as the saying is.

Soon the name was given to the writers for the press and to the poor artists; in fact to all who had the slightest claim to belong to the world of art. But, as time wore on, the name Bohemian came to be applied more to those who walked in the flowery paths of literature than to those of any other class.

So at the present day, when we hear the remark made of a man that he is a "Bohemian," we take it for granted that he is a writer, and not a very reputable one, either. The old meaning of the word—the man that lives by his wits, and lives badly, too—still clings to it.

The Bohemian of New York is one of the odd characters of the great city. His assurance is his strong point. There isn't any thing in the world but what he thinks he can do—referring, of course, to the world of letters. If the managing editor is sick, the Bohemian feels himself perfectly competent to write his editorial for him. He doesn't object to step into the shoes of the commercial editor, if that gentleman is absent; and, if it should be his good fortune to be called upon to "do" the dramatic column, he is in his glory. The theater, indeed, is his strong point. He is personally acquainted with all the actors and actresses. His ready pen is the anguish power that makes and unmakes public favorites. True, he doesn't often get the chance to favor his friends, or give a "dig" to his enemies, for the true Bohemian is the free lance of literature, and serves regularly under no banner, preferring his "own sweet will" to the dictates of a managing editor; but, when he gets the craved-for opportunity, he improves it, too, to the great horror of the unfortunate artist who has neglected to court his acquaintance and ask his favor over a bottle of sparkling champagne, or swell, for your true Bohemian is not particular, and will condescend to quaff the amber beer if he can't procure the vintage "clique." Joy to the keen-eyed son of genius who has descended from the pedestal of art to beg the favor of the worm whose crawling touch soils the marble of the column. A quarter column of unstinted praise pays for the viands that the impartial critic has taken at the Easel's expense.

In his own mind, the Bohemian is always a great genius, whom those in power, in his world, have combined to crush. Confidentially, in his cups, he tells his boon companions, "they dare not give me a chance!" In person, the Bohemian is careless, and thinks not of the allurements of fashion.

The fact that Easter occurs during this month will set everybody to laying eggs in calico. Colored eggs, hard-boiled and laid by imaginary rabbits, will be all the go among the children.

The 15th of April, eighteen hundred and something odd, I went to school all day, or nearly. I began at the foot of my class, and

By nature he is frank and open-hearted; ready to share his last dollar with a friend in need. He thinks only of to-day and cares not for the morrow.

He is the skirmisher, the advance post of the world of letters; he fights always in the van, and he strikes more often for good than for evil. He is a clannish friend or a bitter enemy.

The world has worse men than the jolly, reckless fellows who wear the colors of Bohemia.

A WORD IN SEASON.

Now that spring is fairly inaugurated, and people, as well as nature, are busy making gardens, I think of the many homes all over the land which might be converted into mimic Edens by a little timely labor and expense, where there are no preparations for gardening, no thought of flowers for the coming season, or cool, overshadowing vines to keep off the scorching sun that, in next August, will make the inmates wish for a situation on the north side of an iceberg, where a single scraggy rosebush, or lilac shrub, in the midst of a half-grassed yard, is all of beauty there is about them, where not a solitary flower lends a charm, nor a creeping vine breaks the monotony of the bare, sun-scorched walls.

Homes! Are such places homes? Alas! for the poor inmates who have nothing but drudgery in their lives—noting to sometimes take them out of themselves, and make them forget that life is full of care, and pain, and vexations, by giving them a glimpse of heaven through cool green leaves, and bursting buds, and fragrant blossoms!

I know there are city homes where poverty forbids even the cheap luxury of flowers; where want of room confines the garden to a window, and nothing, save a pot or two of simple and easily cultivated plants may be indulged in. But, in the country, poverty is no excuse for such bareness. The poorest have room for flowers, and may have them without expense.

Are such places homes? Alas! for the poor inmates who have nothing but drudgery in their lives—noting to sometimes take them out of themselves, and make them forget that life is full of care, and pain, and vexations, by giving them a glimpse of heaven through cool green leaves, and bursting buds, and fragrant blossoms!

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Home! Are such places homes? Alas!

HER ANSWER.

BY EBEN E. REXFORD.

I held her hand close in my own, And said, "I love you, you alone." She did not answer; but her eyes Sought mine, as though in great surprise, Then fell, and blushed swept her cheek; I thought she did not dare to speak.

"I love you, darling, and so well, That words can not my passion tell."

She looked not up—she did not speak, But rose-tints stained her half-clad cheek; And, by that sign, I knew she heard, Although she answered not a word.

"Now time nor care can take away The love I feel for you to-day."

Again the roses blossomed out On each fair cheek. I heard, about, The twittering laughter of the birds Who listened to my unanswered words.

"Dear love!" I cried, impatient grown, You give no answer: have you none?" And then, in most bewitching grace, She laughed and looked into my eyes. Why, if you love me as you say, I've not the heart to answer you!"

Strange Stories.

THE GREEK SLAVE.

A TALE OF VENICE.

BY AGILE PENNE.

THE quay of San Mark was almost deserted.

The sun had hid itself behind the line of the western horizon, but the fleecy clouds were yet tinged, pink and purple, by its dying rays.

On the waters that laved the marble feet of the stately palaces of proud and haughty Venice, the Republic of the Sea, rode a fleet of galleys. The gay flags floating from the mast-heads told of victory and of joy.

The Venetian fleet had just returned from an expedition against the pirates that infested the rock-ribbed islands of the Mediterranean Sea.

A bold and daring rover, known as Sysros, the Corsair, had swept the ocean and left a wake of blood behind him.

The Republic of Venice, smouldering under the daring blazes of the hardy rover, had fitted out an expedition against him, given the command to one Leon, a young captain in the service of Venice, descended from a noble Venetian house.

The expedition had met the pirate galleys commanded by Sysros, and, after a bloody conflict, utterly destroyed them.

Young Leon had returned in triumph. All Venice had welcomed him, and the Doge and Council of Three, who rule the republic, had openly decreed that thenceforth he should command the naval forces of Venice.

All seemed sunshine for the young hero, but jealous rivals marked his triumph with envious eyes, and the dark storm-clouds were gathering afar to burst upon his head.

On the quay paced two men. The richness of their dress told that they were noble. Their arms and warlike bearing, that they were captains of some of the galleys that rode so proudly on the bosom of the restless waters.

The taller of the two, a man of forty, dark in face, and stern in bearing, was known as Captain Marco; his companion, one of the most powerful noblemen in Venice, was called Gaspardo.

"By the winged lion of San Mark! it is gross injustice to us that the Doge should put this boy, Leon, in chief command!" cried Marco, in anger.

"Ay, we are older and better soldiers; have freely given our blood in the service of the republic, but our deeds are overlooked—forgotten. A single fight has placed this stripling at the very pinnacle of fame. Did you notice how the multitude flung up their greasy caps and howled Leon's name?" said Gaspardo, bitterly.

"Yes, while we stood by unnoticed."

"We are not men or soldiers if we submit to this wrong," Gaspardo exclaimed.

"Comrade, we will not submit to it!" cried Marco, in anger. "There are some in Venice that yet love me. All my influence shall be exerted to hurl this Leon from the command that like a swallow he has vaulted into."

"I'm with you to the death. We will not hesitate at any means to accomplish our purpose."

"Good! Leon, then, shall fall!" cried a deep voice, that seemed to come from the sea at their feet.

The two started in surprise.

Peering over the edge of the quay, they saw that a light-fishing boat, containing a single man, had approached them from the sea unawares.

The man left the boat, and gaining the surface of the quay, stood by their side.

He was a well-formed, muscular man, of thirty-five or forty, dressed roughly like a fisherman. His face was bronzed by sun and wind, and he showed the martial bearing of the soldier in every motion.

"You have overheard our words?" Marco asked.

"Yes, and come to offer you my services to humble young Leon," the stranger said, in a sonorous voice.

"Who are you?" Gaspardo asked.

"Three days ago on the deck of a proud galley the chief of three hundred brave men, they called me Sysros the Corsair. To-day, a ruined adventurer, I am simply Beppo the fisherman."

Marco gazed in his face with a puzzled look.

"Could I not call you by another name?" he asked.

"Yes," Sysros frankly replied; "years ago in Venice you and I walked side by side. An act of crime, and the republic banished me for life. Fully have I repaid the debt. The man who worked my ruin is now the Doge of Venice. I squared accounts with him at the time, for I stole his infant child and gave it to a Greek to rear as a slave."

"But why do you join us against Leon?"

"Ask my wrecked and shattered galleys that strew dark Candia's shore!" cried Sysros, in heat. "And even now, does he not revel in the charms of a slave, a Greek girl—fair as an angel—whom he captured on my galley?"

"Telda?"

"Yes."

"He has married her."

"And therefore would I ruin him. The girl is lost to me forever, but I have sworn that he shall not enjoy her charms."

"Good; but how ruin him?" cried

Marco.

"Take me with you to the Council of Three; conceal my name; let them know me only as the fisherman, and I will make a disclosure that will give Leon's head to the block. The Three will not have mercy upon him, for—unless my guess is wrong—they already look with envious eyes upon his popularity with the rabble."

"Come, then, at once."

The three departed, and the quay of San Mark was deserted.

In a cosy chamber of Leon's palace, hung with red velvet tapestries, radiant with Tyrian purple and shimmering gold, sat the young Venetian captain, Leon, and the Greek slave, Telda.

Night and Morning were the two. Leon, jet-black hair and eyes; Telda, heavenly blue orbs and tresses of the hue of the ripened wheat basking in the sunbeams.

The arm of the young soldier was clasped tenderly around the taper waist of the girl, and the black eyes looked love into the blue.

"Fortune smiles lovingly upon me, my Telda," said Leon, his right hand toying with the golden tresses of the maid. "In one little hour I won both fame and you. Am I not blessed?"

"And will you always love me, Leon, as well as now?" she asked, with a glance full of love in the face of the young Venetian.

"Yes, until the sun grows cold and the stars of heaven fade and die."

"You love the poor slave?"

"No, I love the beautiful woman whose passion makes for me a heaven on earth," Leon replied, warmly. "But, Telda, tell me something of your life."

"It is but a simple story. All my life from early childhood has been spent in the galley of the Corsair or at his island home, among the caves in the rocks where Sysros kept his spoils."

"Is the Corsair your father?"

"No," replied Telda, quickly. "He pursued me in the slave market. I am a Greek, torn, I suppose, from my parents by corsairs like those of Sysros. He intended me for his wife. Your brave arm snatched me from a fate worse than death."

"It was not written in the stars that one so fair as you, my Telda, should become the prize of the merciless sea rover," said Leon, fondly. "A brighter fate is in store for you, and that is to be the wife of the Venetian captain, Leon."

Finally the young soldier kissed the soft lips of the willing maid.

"Dared I!" and Leon's hot blood leaped into his cheeks.

"Yes; and by so doing have you forfeited your life!"

"Who has the right to hold me to an account for the act?" demanded Leon, in a low voice.

"The law of Venice! Know, rash soldier, that the law of the Republic decrees death to any Venetian of noble blood who shall so far forget his rank as to marry with a slave, and thus taint his ancient blood with an ignoble current."

The color fled from Leon's cheeks, and Telda's full lips unclosed in a low moan of agony.

"You have broken the law; your doom is sealed. Both should die, but in consideration of the brave services that you have done the State, mercifully we spare your life, Leon, but pronounce on you the sentence of eternal banishment from Venice," said the cold voice of the chief of the Three.

"And Telda's fate?" questioned Leon, with pallid lips.

"Death!"

Like a knell of doom the single word rung in the ears of the young lovers.

"Hear me but a moment!" cried Leon, in despair. "It is I that have committed the crime; it is but justice, then, that I alone should suffer. This poor child knew not of your laws. I saved her from the power of the dreaded Corsair; she was your preserver. I loved her and she gave her young life into my keeping. Let me alone atone for the fault. The law outraged, demands a victim. Take my life, then, and spare this helpless girl."

"It can not be. The girl must die," said the masked judge, sternly. "Officers, your duty."

The black-robed figures advanced.

In utter despair Leon clasped the girl to his heart and imprinted a farewell kiss upon her cold lips.

Death had no terrors after such a parting.

Then suddenly, with a noiseless step, a masked man entered the hall, and, bending low before the judge, spoke.

"The Corsair, Sysros, haunting Venice in disguise, has been struck down by some unknown foe who recognized him. He is dying, and implores an audience with the Council of Three. He declares he has a secret to unfold respecting the Doge and the young Venetian soldier, Leon."

dear, but you ought not to accuse me of doing what I'd never do."

She smiled up in his dark face, but there was only a heavier shadow gathering there.

"Olympia! do you pretend to deny that you are deporting yourself in a most unwise, unprincipled—"

A swift warning gleam in her beautifully blue eyes bade him desist from his sweeping accusations.

"Harry Verener, don't call me 'unprincipled'; remember I am your wife, and as such, entitled to respect."

He frowned, then smiled sarcastically.

"Exactly; for the same reason, I expect proper conduct on your behalf. As it is, do you think it modest and ladylike to accept all these attentions from Howard Ingold?"

A hot, red flush swept over Olympia Verener's white face; she bit her lips till they were bloodless, so sternly did she strive to retain command of the bitter words that burst from her tongue's end.

Her husband seemed half exultant at her passion, and a cold gleam was in his eyes when he retorted:

"The 'shoe fits,' Olympia. You know you and Howard Ingold are in love with each other, while I, always *de trop*, can make the best of it."

Gradually her cheeks had lost their crimson tinge, and when Mr. Verener ceased speaking, Olympia arose from her chair, very elegant, very stylish, very womanly, in her graceful dignity.

"Harry, I will not retaliate with harsh words, for they will only serve to widen the chasm I fear you are determined to place between us. Harry, you *surely* do not mean to accuse me—me, your wife of disloyalty and your wife, and for Mr. Ingold?"

Her quiet, passionless manner was lost upon Mr. Verener, who, as he looked on her beauty, so marked, so rare, only felt a thrill of terrible jealousy when he remembered that Olympia had aforetime expressed, in her own peculiar way, full of impulsive enthusiasm, her extreme admiration for Mr. Howard Ingold; and, as he have faithfully tried to serve both you and Olympia through the sad affair, I can assure you I shall leave no stone unturned to prove my assertions regarding that man, and also to reunite you and your wife—unless, indeed—"

She hesitated, grew almost solemn in her manner, the while steadily regarding Harry with her wondrous gray eyes, so full of lights and shadows.

"Mr. Verener's heart seemed to pause for a second; that peculiar 'unless, indeed' had thrilled him with a nameless terror.

"What—Irene—tell me?"

On the impulse of the moment he addressed her as he never had done before, and her eyes fairly scintillated when she heard it.

"Because I have a dreadful fear, Mr. Verener, that he has usurped your place in your wife's affections; not that I would suspect Olympia of a wrong act, understand me, please, only, Harry, it behoves us to be very cautious."

How naturally it fell from her lips—that Harry!—and his ears had not heard it from home for many a day.

"I am overpowered by this revelation! do you think—Pshaw, why discuss it? I must beg you to permit me to say adieu now."

A pang of pitiful remorse had suddenly come to Harry Verener as he heard his wife's name used so lawlessly, and, acting as he often did from a sudden impulse, he withdrew, leaving Irene puzzled at his strange conduct.

But there was unmistakable triumph in her eyes, as she watched him away.

"Would another woman living dare play so desperate a game on such small chances? But success is crowning my efforts, and when the clematis stars drop off, Olympia Verener will have been separated from her husband, and I, I, Irene Seaford, will have won him! Only a little more planning, a little more patience!"

A week afterward it was, that Olympia Verener received a note from Howard Ingold, asking her to meet him at the cottage of the gardener, with whose wife he had arranged for the use of one of her rooms for a short time. He said he would only detain her a few moments, as he wished only to ask a question of her.

To say Mrs. Verener was indignant, but partly expresses the anger, almost fury, of her manner when she read the note.

"How dare he!" she almost screamed, dashing the paper from her, and rising with scarlet-stained cheeks. "After his insulting proposals the other day, when I forbade that he ever should speak to me again—how, I wonder, dare he address me thus? I'll take Jasper, if he's not busy at the stables, and go see him cowhided!"

Trembling with excitement and indignation, she donned saucy and bonnet, and started for the colored coachman.

At the side entrance her husband met her; his face wearing an unusual pallor, his eyes glowing nervously.

"Out for a walk?"

He was, as lately, frigidly courteous.

"Yes," she returned, and hurried on, while Harry, with compressed lips, watched her out of sight.

Then he took a scrap of paper from his memorandum-book, and re-read the few lines thereon.

"Dear FRIEND—I fear for the worst. To my own certain knowledge, Mr. H. I. has begged an interview at the stone cottage, and if O. goes out at nine or thereabouts—but I will not say further."

"I. S."

"Was Miss Seaford right when she thus warned me? Good Heavens! that it should come to this! that I should be—"

He thrust the paper in his pocket, and without completing the sentence, hastened off toward the cottage, strange, agonizing thoughts of Olympia's falsehood, mingled with the rare beauty of Irene Seaford, chasing wildly through his brain.

The door was ajar an inch or so, and clearly and distinctly came Olympia's voice from within; and with his eager eyes to the crack, he saw Howard Ingold, handsome, listless, sitting at ease by the table, his eyes fixed on Mrs. Verener's face, that Harry could not read.

He heard the high, indignant tones, and saw her hand stretched passionately out, and as he listened, a deep, intense bliss crept slowly over his soul.

"I certainly consider it an insult, sir—the words you have spoken to me, of Mr. Verener. What have I ever said or done to warrant this disrespect you have shown me? True it was, I liked you as a friend; but rest assured, from this day we are strangers."

"Or enemies?" Mr. Ingold said, lowly. "I would not wish that, for your sake."

of villains was brought to a timely, happy end; and in later days Harry and Olympia learned how the two—Irene Seaford and Howard Ingold, had planned it all together, each for their own wicked ends.

And they also learned, by their bitter experience, how much better it is that there be perfect confidence on all subjects between husband and wife.

Oath-Bound:

OR,
THE MASKED BRIDE.

BY MRS. MARY REED CROWELL,
AUTHOR OF "SHADOWED HEART," "SCARLET CRES-
CENT," ETC.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

SHE had not long to wait; for, on the stroke of the hour, Bertrand Haigthe opened the door; pale, frigid, angered.

"I am here, Undine Del Rose."

He never bowed, or otherwise acknowledged her presence.

"No. I am Undine Del Rose no longer. I have the honor of being Mrs. Haigthe, of The Towers. Oh, Bertrand! Bertrand!" and her tones lost their slight touch of sarcastic triumph, and sunk to a low, entreaty murmur, "don't quite hate me! I have but one excuse, and that is my love for you. Nothing else would have warranted the awful risk I have run. And see, Bertrand, Providence has signally favored me; for not even you read my identity."

She laid her hands on his shoulder, and looked up in his face, as white as death, with eyes that would have annihilated her, had that been possible.

He dashed her off with a gesture of inflexible scorn and disgust.

"Don't touch me! don't mention the holy name of the Almighty with those false, lying lips! Say rather that Satan and all his angels have aided you in this fiendish scheme! Woman—tell me how you dared do it; tell me, before I crush all your life out of you!"

He advanced a step toward her, his hot breath flaming on her cheeks.

"Bertrand, be reasonable. Remember, I am your bride, married to you by every law that the land demands. Listen, Bertrand, while I humble myself to you, and beg and pray you to love me a—"

"Silence! not a word of such blasphemy from your lips! I command you, tell me what you mean—the woman I hate and abhor! the woman who shall never be my wife, despite all your infernal machinations."

Undine smiled defiantly.

"And suppose I refuse to listen to your demand?"

"Then I will wrench it from you! What did you do to my betrothed?"

"A strange question for my husband to ask his wife!"

"You madden me! I your husband? Never, if you were the last woman on God's earth. You, the arch fiendess, my wife! who has crushed my happiness the second time? Not if I could thereby earn your eternal salvation!"

"I am sorry you persist in this style of language. Bertrand, doesn't it move you in the least when you know what I have dared to do for your sake?"

He stopped before her.

"Does it move me? Yes, with infinite pity and tenderness when I think of my crushed Crystel; moved to scorn and disgust when I look at you with all the beauty you have used to cover your wickedness."

"You thought and spoke differently the evening you spent in Lexington avenue; the morning we rode in the Central Park."

"If I was infatuated then, I am disenchanted now! I thank God you have no legal claim on me!"

She laughed lightly.

"I think I have. Are we not lawfully married?"

"Married?" He fairly thundered the word. "Never will I admit it! Before the world I will proclaim your treachery!"

She extended her hand, on which glittered the curious green-and-scarlet-veined jewel.

"You do not regard this? You are no longer afraid of it?"

He grasped her slender wrist, and tore from her finger.

"Should I fear an impostor, a thief, as I believe you to be? or a ring that is my own, and that never wrought me any harm?"

A sudden, intense light shot from her eyes, and she compressed her lips a moment before she answered.

"It must never yet have wrought harm, but I swear that it shall. Now, Bertrand Haigthe, what are we to do?"

He curled his lips contemptuously.

"I neither care to, nor feel at all interested in your future movements. I shall take the first train to Edenwilde, and further expose this treachery. And if harm comes to Crystel Roscoe, *you* are to blame!"

He never vouchsafed her a glance as he went out, and as the door closed after him, his parting words echoed on her ear:

"*Woe to you!*"

Was it a curse or a prophecy? And so far, her deeply-plotted plans, her superhuman effort that had been so tantalizingly crowned with success, had come to this!

She walked up and down, and around that elegant room; while, like a keen poniard at her heart, was the bitter, undurable anguish of the knowledge that he did not love her—never would love her.

She sunk down exhausted, one of the sofas, cursing the luckless fate that had lured her on to fondly hope and believe he would forget Roscoe, his first love, the moment he saw her.

"I have been worse than mad! I have been too hasty; I have thwarted what long-suffering patience might have accomplished. And now, he despises me; while I—oh, I shall die for the want of his love!"

A look of unutterable despair came over her face.

"And while I've been engaged, heart and soul, in seeking to win this man; while I crazed my brains in scheming, planning and contriving, I've lost the other; who, before I saw Bertrand Haigthe, I loved as I thought I never could love again. Clifford Temple has passed beyond my reach; these accursed Haigthes have won him, too! And I, I am alone unloved, despised! I can not bear it; I will die! My brain is scorching, and my heart—my poor, trampled heart—that is broken and bleeding!"

She had just reached the entrance-gate, when Annette locked the door, and hastily

retired to her own room; one she occupied alone.

"All the disguise I need will be to arrange this gray hair of mine, and powder my face as white as I can. These heretofore tell-tale eyes of mine have done their last mischief, curse him!"

And, indeed, in her plain, dark dress and saucie, the puffs of gray hair, the dull, lustrous eyes, no one, even Clifford Temple or Mrs. St. Havens herself, would have known her.

She had plenty of time to get to the station; and by going down a side-entrance, she met no one of the family servants.

"I wonder if my suspicions are correct? Could she have gone to The Towers? or did I read her thoughts aright, and see her from her own window as she hastened back this way?"

"At any rate, if she's not at the depot—and what she means by going is more than even I can tell; however, she shall never get out of my sight while I have power to watch her—as I said, if she's not at the depot, it's easy coming home again."

Such were Annette's thoughts as she hurried along.

At the window stood Crystel, softly tapping the glass with her kid-gloved fingers; then the train came rushing in. Crystel placed her hand in her pocket to take from the her portmanteau, that she never deemed safe in a crowd out of her hands.

Once in the train, she replaced it, and found, to her vexation, that she had lost both her handkerchief and a valued penknife—a gold-and-pearl-handled one, that had been a present from Helliee years before, when she was a school-girl, and that bore her initials, C. R., handsomely engraved.

She uttered a little exclamation, and the lady who sat next her looked up from the afternoon paper she was reading.

"Have you lost your money?"

It was a rather strained, harsh voice, and Crystel glanced at the massive gray puff of hair that filled the inside of her bonnet; a small plain sacque and dark dress; the cotton gloves; the brown vail; in her inquisitive way, before she answered.

"No, thank you. Only my handkerchief and pen-knife."

Then she leaned toward the window, and dismissing the thought of her trifling loss, was soon deep in her plans that had led her to thus secretly go to the city. She had but one object; and that was, knowing where Bertrand had gone, to follow, and thus satisfy herself as to whether the strange, bold girl who had married him had any designs on his life, since he had repudiated her love.

Crystel loved Bertrand greatly, and it was that love that urged her on; that compelled her, as it were, to follow the sudden, powerful impulse to go. What caused her to first think of it she knew not then; only in after days did she know it was the iron finger of her inevitable fate that drew her whithersoever it would.

But, after all her coming to the city, she was unable to find Bertrand; he had changed his mind as to the route he should take, and Crystel, after visiting several stores and offices where both were acquainted, returned to the depot, and reached Edenwilde a half-hour before the gentlemen.

She was a little nervous, and in her endeavor to preserve her innocent little secret, she attracted the ever-watchful attention of Helliee; and although she made no remarks, she wondered what was the matter with Crystel.

At a late hour the household retired, and Bertrand and Clifford returned to The Towers.

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 53.)

CHAPTER XV.

DID SHE LOSE IT?

The family at Edenwilde were all up in arms about the strange events of the preceding night, the household at The Towers were in a similar state, particularly their guest, Clifford Temple.

At first he could not seem to comprehend it, so suddenly and mysteriously had it all happened; then, when the truth gradually made itself clear, he started at once for the city.

"You know not this girl as well as I; nor her disposition. She will not give you so long, so as she has the faintest claim upon you," he said to Bertrand, as he stopped for a moment at Edenwilde, where he found Crystel and young Haigthe in the parlour.

"She was a little nervous, and in her endeavor to preserve her innocent little secret, she attracted the ever-watchful attention of Helliee; and although she made no remarks, she wondered what was the matter with Crystel.

At a late hour the household retired, and Bertrand and Clifford returned to The Towers.

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 53.)

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LEAGUE OF THREE.

A STRANGE STORY OF AMERICAN LIFE.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

AUTHOR OF "HEART OF FIRE," "WOLF DEMON," "SCARLET HAND," "ACE OF SPADES," ETC.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WITCH'S LETTER.

Montgomery read the letter in astonishment. It was brief.

"Did I predict truly at Newport or not?"

Already the best part of your fortune is gone.

The love that you thought so true has proved to be a hollow mockery. Are you convinced, or are you still blind? Even now, another blow is aimed at you. Are you prepared to receive it? Not. With uncovered head you bow to it; may more, you invite it to beg the stroke that will crush you to the earth. You rush madly to your doom. I pity and would save you, if you will heed my warning. Will you do so? You shall give me your answer to-night. Be at the Central Park gate, Seventh avenue and Fifty-ninth street, to-night, at nine o'clock. I will meet you there. If you value your future happiness, come to me."

"THE WHITE WITCH."

So read the letter that the young man pursued. The mystery seemed to be thickening around him.

"Who can this mysterious personage be?"

he asked, in wonder. "How can she watch my footstep in this way. I must find the servant; perhaps from him I can learn who gave him the letter."

Acting at once on the thought, Montgomery ascended the stairs again. After giving him the letter the servant had gone upstairs.

Montgomery had not noticed the face of the man particularly, but he had no doubt that he could tell him again at a glance.

In the corridor at the head of the stairs, Montgomery met one of the servants. A single look into his face and the young man thought that he recognized the person who had given him the letter.

"Who gave you that letter for me?"

Montgomery asked, accosting the servant.

The colored waiting-man looked at Montgomery in astonishment.

"Did you speak to me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes; who gave you the letter that you handed me just now?" repeated Montgomery.

"Letter, sir?" said the servant, rolling up his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes, the one you gave me a moment ago; you remember, Mr. Montgomery's letter?"

The young man was sure that he had got hold of the right man, for his voice was familiar as well as his face.

"Bress de Lord! I didn't give yer no letter boss!" exclaimed the negro.

"Yes you did," persisted Montgomery, who guessed at once that the man had been bribed to silence.

"By golly, boss! I hain't seen no letter!" said the servant, in wonder.

"You have probably forgotten the little circumstance," and as Montgomery spoke,

he took a dollar greenback from his pocket-book and gave it to the servant. "Don't you think you can remember the letter now?" he asked.

"Much obliged, boss," said the colored man, pocketing the greenback, with a grin that extended his mouth from ear to ear.

"And now, who gave you the letter?"

"Iclare to goodness, boss, I don't know nuffin' bout de letter!" was again replied.

Montgomery's brows contracted. "He saw

me not bid high enough.

"Hark ye, my friend," he said, "will a five-dollar note induce you to tell me who gave you that letter?"

"I don't know nuffin' bout de letter," was again replied.

"Then go and see her by all means," said Pipgan, quickly. "What sort of a looking woman is this White Witch?"

"Well, I can hardly tell," replied Montgomery. "I only saw her for a few minutes, and then she was masked and disguised in such a way that she baffled recognition."

"Was she tall—that is, a good-sized woman, not little?"

"Yes."

"Rayther slender form?"

"Yes."

"Large black eyes?"

"Yes." Montgomery was astonished.

"And her voice?"

"Disguised so that I can not describe it. But is it possible that you know the girl or woman—whatever she is—that is playing the part of this sibyl?" Montgomery asked, in wonder.

"I know her?" exclaimed Pipgan, opening his eyes in astonishment. "Why, cold I?"

"But your description is exact."

"I was only guessing, Yankee fashion, at what I thought she might look like," replied the Englishman.

"Oh!" exclaimed Montgomery, disappointed; "I fancied that perhaps you had a clue."

"Oh, did you?" said Pipgan, quietly.

"Then you advise me to keep this appointment?"

"Yes, and I'll go with you."

"What do you see in the street that is so interesting, Leone?" he asked, approaching her.

"Nothing."

"You are a foolish girl to look so long and earnestly upon nothing," O'Connell said, with a sneer, and, as he spoke, he drew a chair to him and sat down in it, facing the girl.

"Leone, have the kindness to transfer your attention from the outside world to your humble servant for a few minutes and you will greatly oblige the subscriber," O'Connell said, in a tone of mock politeness.

"Well?" and Leone turned her face from the window and looked, coldly, at O'Connell.

"Good; that is better," and then O'Connell surveyed the face of the girl for a few moments in silence.

"Why do you look at me so intently?" Leone asked.

"I am reading."

"Reading?"

"Yes, your face. It is very interesting," O'Connell said, a peculiar smile hovering phantom-like around his mouth.

"And what do you read there?"

"That you have obeyed my orders."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; Montgomery has been here to see you; he has told you that he loved you, and you have told him that he was loved in return."

"You are sure of it?"

"Quite," O'Connell answered, coolly. "Why, the truth is as plainly written in your face as though the words were imprinted there. There is a joyous look in your flashing, dark eyes, a smile of happiness upon your lips, where, possibly, the perfume of his warm kiss yet lingers. Don't try to deceive me, Leone. I have known you too long to be easily deceived."

"I have not denied the truth of your words," she said, slowly.

"And you are now Montgomery's promised wife?"

"Yes."

"Good!" and O'Connell rubbed his hands together, softly, as if in joy. "All then is as I wish. Leone, you have played your part well. You have kept your word with me and I will keep mine with you."

"You will release me from the bond that binds me to you?"

"Yes, you shall be free, your own mistress, no longer the slave of my will. Doesn't a bright vision of happiness arise before you?"

"Why should I dream of happy days to come?" the girl asked, slowly.

"Why should you not?" he said, in a tone of wonder. "If the past has been dark and gloomy, is that a reason why the future should be also sad?"

"No, but—"

"But what?" he asked, impatiently. "You have won the love of Angus Montgomery; if the old saying is true, love is the whole of a woman's life; though with man, it is but the history of a day. You love and you are loved. What more can you ask?"

"You speak as if you thought that I intended to become Montgomery's wife," the girl said, her dark eyes flashing as she spoke.

"Of course," replied O'Connell, coolly;

"you are not such an idiot as to refuse him?"

"I shall never be his wife," Leone replied.

"Are you mad?" O'Connell exclaimed.

"No, I am only just."

"Just?" and O'Connell's tone was sneering in the extreme.

"Yes, both to him and to myself," answered Leone, firmly. "I promised you that I would try and make him love me; you compelled me to do so, for, by the word that I gave years ago. I am as a slave in your hands. But I will never deceive the man who has honored me with his love. After you release me from my promise, I will tell Angus Montgomery who and what I am."

"You're a fool!" exclaimed O'Connell, coolly.

"Better a fool than to act a knavish part!" replied the girl, quickly.

"Well, it is your affair, not mine," O'Connell said, carelessly. "And now to business. You remember what I wished you to do?"

"Obtain Montgomery's check?"

"Yes, the check to be filled up by you."

"Suppose that he objects to this?"

"If he loves you, he will not," O'Connell replied.

"Lionel, why do you hate this man so bitterly?" asked the girl, suddenly.

"What is that to you?" replied O'Connell, coolly.

"You must have some reason."

"I have. Did you ever know me to do anything without a reason?" he asked.

"Never," she replied; "you are cold and calculating; your heart must be marble, not flesh."

"Perhaps it is," he replied, with a light laugh. Then a sudden thought occurred to him. "Leone," he said, abruptly, "as I entered the hotel just now, a man stood in the doorway, whose face seemed strangely familiar to me."

"Well?"

"His face sent a cold chill through every vein, and you know, Leone, I am not easily agitated. Can you guess why this man's face should trouble me?"

"No," she replied, absently. She was hardly heeding his words; her thoughts were far away.

"It was because his face recalled to my mind the affair in England that so nearly cost me my life."

The girl started and a cloud came over his face as he spoke.

"Why should the face of this stranger remind you of that dreadful event?" she asked.

"That I can not tell; but the face had some connection with the affair."

"Ah!" and Leone started suddenly, as the exclamation broke from her lips.

"What's the matter?" O'Connell asked, noticing the strange expression upon her face.

"Your words have recalled to my mind something that I intended to tell you before, but I forgot to speak of it. Some time ago, a man, evidently an Englishman, came to the door and wished to know if I wanted to purchase a little dog that he had for sale."

"Well, what of that?" asked O'Connell, who saw nothing remarkable in the circumstance.

"When I asked the dog's name, he answered that it was called Mally, short for Malper."

O'Connell could not repress an exclamation of surprise as the name fell upon his ears.

"Malper!" he muttered.

"Yes, I thought that the coincidence was strange. I did not let the man see that the name was familiar to me, and carelessly I

said that the name was a strange one; he replied that it was the name given to the puppy by the man from whom he had bought it."

O'Connell remained silent for a few moments busy in thought.

"What was this man like?" he asked, suddenly.

"He was not quite so tall as you are dressed common, but not shabby; keen gray eyes and light yellow hair."

"Any beard?"

"No."

"Was his hair curly?"

"No; straight."

"His face thin; rather a large nose?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Leone, the face of your dog-man is exactly the face of the man that I met just now at the hotel door, below; I am afraid that we are in danger."

A troubled look swept over the face of the girl.

"Then you think—"

"That a sleuth-hound is on our track?" he said, with fierce accent.

Leone shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"Do not fear!" he cried: "leave my wits alone to get the better of this fellow who has tracked us over the broad ocean. He is hunting us; in turn, I'll hunt him. Don't fear; the danger is as yet far in the distance. Lose no time in getting Montgomery to sign the check. That done, I release you from your promise, and you are free to go where you like and with whom you like."

"Montgomery is coming to-morrow. I will try and carry out our wishes."

"Do so; I will come again to-morrow evening. Till then, good-by," and O'Connell left Leone to her own sad thoughts.

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 49.)

The Blackfoot Queen:

OR,

OLD NICK WHIFFLES IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

A Sequel to "The Phantom Princess."

BY CAPT. J. F. C. ADAMS,

AUTHOR OF "THE PHANTOM PRINCESS; OR, NED HAZEL, THE BOY TRAPPER."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE TOILS.

LITTLE did Nick Whiffles and Ned Mackintosh dream of the experience to which Leone was doomed, when they left her to herself in the wood.

Her position seemed so secure against discovery by the Blackfeet, that even the veteran trapper deemed it perfectly safe, so long as the darkness lasted.

The girl resolved to obey the instruction of her old friend to the letter, and drawing the blancket close around her, she sat down at the foot of the tree, under which she had been standing, and almost instantly sunk into a profound slumber, for she needed rest, as much as did her lover.

As they flared up they made the immediate circle in which they were standing as light as day.

Perhaps, in her distress, Leone's remarkable beauty was increased, for when the young chief turned his dark eyes upon her, there was no anger and nothing but love in his expression, and with something like sadness in his voice, he asked:

"Why did the Queen of the Woods flee from me?"

"She wished to go to her own home and kindred."

"Her home is with the Blackfeet, and none of her kindred can love her as they do."

"But Miona is white and they are red; they are of different races and can not consort together."

"Love knows no race nor color" was the rather poetic expression of the dusky lover, who certainly did not intend that he should be argued out of the position he had assumed.

"Woo-wol-na promised that when five summers had come and gone, I should be sent to my people. Has Woo-wol-na two tongues?"

"Red Bear made no such promise," was the sullen reply of the Blackfoot.

"But he does the Queen a great wrong; she has spent many years with the Blackfeet; they have treated her kindly, and she loves them; but her heart is with her father and mother, who are waiting her coming."

"Let them come to the Queen," replied the warrior; "she shall be given the chief's lodge, they shall sleep upon the finest furs, and shall eat the fattest buffalo; they shall be welcome for all the moons they wish to stay, and those are the friends of the Blackfoot Queen."

Miona had no hope or thought of gaining a concession from her captor, but she was seeking merely to gain time. There was a faint stir of hope again when she found no other Indians near the fire. Surely Nick Whiffles and her lover must speedily miss her and institute a search, and she believed the sagacity of the trapper ought to be sufficient to direct him to the right spot.

The absence of the Blackfeet was as inexplicable as that of her friends. She knew that the wood was swarming with the dusky foes, and how it was that they still remained away was certainly singular, to say the least.

She was not aware that this was only one of a number of fires, kindled here and there in the valley for the purpose of distracting the fugitives and preventing their escape over the ridge.

Red Bear showed the same deference toward her that had characterized him during the years past. He evidently regretted the outbreak of which he had been guilty at the deserted village, and which he was certain had hastened the flight of the girl, and caused the aversion with which she seemed to regard him.

Having recovered possession of her again, he was now anxious to undo this mischief and to restore himself to his original place in her esteem.

Both were standing near the fire; he had his arms folded, in the stoical, indifferent manner of the Indian warrior, while his swarthy face, and his dark eyes that scarcely ever wandered from hers, were lit up with an expression of undisguised admiration and love.

Surely no Indian had ever coveted maid as she did, he thought. She was worth any sacrifice or danger that he could offer.

Nick Whiffles stood by her shoulder, his arm around her waist, and his dark eyes that scarcely ever wandered from hers, were lit up with an expression of undisguised admiration and love.

Red Bear was standing with his arms folded, his gun leaning against the nearest tree, fairly cornered, but still defiant and ready to die the death that he was certain was only delayed for a few minutes.

Her speech came back to her, but what should she say? What reply could she give? What was to be gained by attempting to baffle words with him who knew no reason or mercy?

"Well, what of that?" asked O'Connell, who saw nothing remarkable in the circumstance.

"When I asked the dog's name, he answered that it was called Mally, short for Malper."

O'Connell could not repress an exclamation of surprise as the name fell upon his ears.

"Malper!" he muttered.

"Yes, I thought that the coincidence was strange. I did not let the man see that the name was familiar to me, and carelessly I

said that no one else was encountered, nor did she hear any indication of the proximity of her friends.

"Why do they remain away? Have they too deserted me?" she wailed, in her anguish. "Is there no hope for me?"

The heavens seemed closed, indeed. As the dim moonlight fell upon her captor, she glanced askance at him. In the obscurity he seemed ten times more hideous and repulsive than ever before.

She did not dare struggle or resist him. She knew what a fearful temper he possessed, and she wondered at his forbearance, in the face of the struggle she had already made to flee from him.

Perhaps the exultation he felt in her capture compensated him for all the labor he had undergone in the pursuit.

Whither would he take her? Back to the camp, where his companions were awaiting his return?

She had scarcely asked herself this question, when he left the path, taking the side opposite to the one by which they had entered it, and at that moment utter, hopeless, dead despair took possession of her.

Why struggle against fate? She was doomed to fall into his hands; the fond dreams that had cheered her for years were not to be realized; hope was all a mockery; there was no happiness for her; she was never to see that cherished mother again, nor the face of that father that had vanished as suddenly as he appeared before her.

"Lead on, Red Bear," she murmured, hardly knowing what she said.

The triumphant young chief needed no such admonition as for his stroke through the wood so rapidly, dragging her after him, that she could scarcely keep her feet.

She had no knowledge or thought of the direction she was pursuing, for it was nothing to her, and she did not seek to know. She only knew that she was the most wretched and suffering of mortals, and that the future was all a blank to her. The bright sky overhead held no moon or stars for her.

On, still on he led her, his grasp never relaxing, and stumbling forward, as though held in the power of some horrid nightmare.

When it seemed to her that she had been dragged forward for a mile (although it was less than one-eighth of that distance), she saw that they were nearing a camp-fire. She concluded at once that it was the main one, around which most of the party were gathered, but was somewhat surprised upon reaching it to observe that no one else was near. They were still as much alone as though buried in the very depth of the forest.

Still the camp had been recently visited, for the fire was burning so brightly as to prove that it must have been replenished but a short time before. There was a heap of brush and fuel lying near, and gathering up an armful, Red Bear cast it upon the flames.

As they flared up they made the immediate circle in which they were standing as light as day.

